

## Dedication



Mwalimu Professor Dr. Theodora Ayot  
January 7, 1946—February 4, 2021

## Tribute Essay

### **Mwalimu Theodora Ayot: Educator, Humanitarian, Visionary Leader and Founder of the Soul Source Foundation and Operation My People**

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#### **Abstract**

This essay is a tribute to Mwalimu Theodora Ayot. It is about Mwalimu's legacy as a humanitarian who entailed and demonstrated what it means to be human in an unjust world. In so doing, Mwalimu Ayot translated love into action by modelling how it involves distributing privilege from those who have it to those who lack it. This essay shows how in her actions, relations and professional capacity Mwalimu Ayot led by example. Mwalimu Ayot changed the world one mind at a time, both at home in Kenya and among her colleagues and students at North Park University. This essay highlights Ayot's enduring legacy through her educational activities, scholarship, and as a member and treasurer of the African Studies Research Forum—ASRF (2006-2008 and 2008-2010). It also discusses Mwalimu's legacy as the founder of both Soul Source Foundation and Operation My People. Mwalimu Ayot encouraged girls and women's education based on the belief that to uplift the conditions facing them is to transform their world as well as those of others. She exposed her students and North Park University alumni to thinking across cultural divisions by inspiring them to establish Operation My People.

Mwalimu Ayot also led students and alumni on various trips to Kenya where they learned first-hand about the conditions facing people in Rusinga Island in Western Kenya. She was bold, courageous and patient in all her activities.

### **Tribute Essay**

It was Mwalimu Ayot who averred the following: “To what do we attribute the fortune we had to be loved and love someone so unique?” “At face value it teaches us how to love. Love is both an action and a mindset. Love is building common ground by showing others what you think is good. Love is redistributing power and privilege as you believe the world should be.” (Instagram by Soul Source Foundation, Kenya: December 30, 2021 <https://www.instagram.com/p/CYHcNSeWPY/>).

My wish is to have written this tribute to my sister while she was alive. Mwalimu Ayot welcomed me with open arms to the African Studies Research Forum (ASRF). Through her sensitivity to the needs of others, patience and perseverance, Mwalimu Ayot exemplified the African proverb “Good character is like perfume.” Mwalimu Ayot’s educational journey included Moi Girls Highschool, Kenya Highschool, Kenya Polytechnic, Hiram College, Ohio (BA History), Nairobi University (Master’s) and Kenyatta University (PhD History).

Mwalimu Ayot was a Professor of History at North Park University from 1996 until she retired in 2018. She taught courses on African history, and political, economic and social development. She served in many committees, wrote various scholarly works covering issues dealing with African history, ethnic conflict, European history, health, citizens’ rights, leadership, political violence, reconstruction after genocide, and women’s rights (Bangura: 2010, 18). Her students remember her as a caring professor who encouraged them to perform to the best of their abilities. She modelled kindness and patience that inspired both her students and colleagues.

Mwalimu Ayot never forgot her roots and those who were left behind. Her goal was to transform the world one mind at a time. Toward that goal, Mwalimu Ayot established the Soul Source Foundation to empower girls and women through educational and health-related programs in 2008. These programs provide educational support for students in secondary schools, college and universities in western Kenya. This support is critical in ensuring that students do not miss attending classes because of lack of tuition (<https://soulsourcefoundation.org/>).

Working with the Soul Source Foundation also inspired Mwalimu Ayot along with alumni from North Park University to establish “Operation My People” which offers scholarships for students. It focuses on the seven areas of life: (1) relationships, (2) sexuality, (3) money, (4) work, (5) body, (6) emotions, and (7) spirituality. The Operation My People scholarship program began in 2010 at Kamasengre Mixed Secondary School on Rusinga Island. The program developed from a request by Professor Theodora Ayot to help ensure the opportunity for a quality education for young girls in her home community. The program began with two students sponsored in 2010, and has since maintained around 40 students per year ([https://fundrazr.com/3uHp9?ref=ab\\_4DPKbEKdFF54DPKbEKdFF5](https://fundrazr.com/3uHp9?ref=ab_4DPKbEKdFF54DPKbEKdFF5)).

One of the most important services that is provided through “Operation My People” is teaching girls and women about health-related issues, especially on Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS) and reproduction. This education is critical since most of the schools do not address these sensitive issues. Mwalimu Ayot’s legacy continues as the seeds she planted through her actions, scholarship, service and visionary leadership continue to grow. May we learn from

her life and the African proverb that “Anyone who thinks they are too small to make a difference, must remember the mosquito!”

### **References**

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